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**From Promise to Progress: A call to Action for All Girls in The Gambia**

**Banjul – 11th October 2024** - The future of The Gambia is not just being written – it is being dreamed, imagined, and shaped by the boundless aspirations of our girls. As we mark the International Day of the Girl, The Gambia stands at a crossroads. While progress has been made in championing girls' rights, a stark reality persists adolescent girls make up 12% of the Gambian population according to the latest data census yet our nation's future hangs in the balance of unfulfilled commitments and unrealized potential.

The Gambia has taken significant strides in promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of girls. We have ratified numerous international conventions on human, child, and women's rights including The United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child (UNCRC) & Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women which were domesticated in The Children’s Act of The Gambia 2005 and the Women’s Act 2010, respectively. These global commitments have been translated into national laws and acts, signaling a formal recognition of the importance of girls' empowerment. Yet, there remains a huge challenge in the implementation of these conventions and make it a reality for every girl particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable ones.

Our government's efforts to combat harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage have yielded some results. The recent success in preventing the repeal of the law banning FGM is a testament to this progress. However, these victories, while important, are merely the first steps on a long journey.

The stark truth is that implementation and monitoring of our laws remains inadequate. Many girls in The Gambia continue to face barriers to education, with the gross enrollment rate for adolescent girls in senior secondary education stagnating at 65.6%. Issues related to sexual and reproductive health persist, with 20% of girls and women aged 15-49 reporting missed social activities, school, or work due to menstruation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated these systemic weaknesses. It has laid bare the fragility of our progress and the urgent need for robust, sustainable solutions.

As we reflect on this International Day of the Girl, we must realize the need to do more for the girls of the country. Our vision for the future – one of equality, opportunity, and dignity – remains unfulfilled. The promise we made to our daughters when we signed those international conventions and passed those national laws remains unkept.

The path forward is clear, nonetheless challenging. We must:

1. Continue to amplify awareness campaigns to educate both rightsholders and duty bearers about girls' rights.
2. Strengthen government systems to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of existing laws.
3. Create job opportunities for girls and fund women led entrepreneurship by Investing heavily in girls' education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels; as well as equipping them with adequate and appropriate market driven skilling.
4. Increase girls’ access to all relevant services including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health.
5. Justice systems must be accessible for girls, gender responsive and child centric. Accelerate the justice delivery especially for cases of sexual and gender-based violence.
6. Link child protection issues with social protection policies and establish an integrated social protection system that provides socio-economic support to the most marginalized and vulnerable girls and their families including girls with disabilities.
7. Investing on capacitating families and communities to ensure an enabling and protective environment where every girl survives and thrives.
8. Accelerate multi-sectoral programming and investment to girl-centric, gender transformative programming

The future of The Gambia depends on the empowerment of its girls. Every unfulfilled potential, every silenced voice, every broken promise represents a loss not just for that individual girl, but for our entire nation. We cannot afford to continue this path of half-measures and unfulfilled commitments.

On this International Day of the Girl, let us recommit ourselves to real, measurable action. Let us hold ourselves and our institutions accountable. Let us work tirelessly to create a Gambia where every girl can not only dream big but can turn those dreams into reality.

The future of The Gambia is bright, and girls are at the heart of this promise. By ensuring their rights, unleashing their potential, and amplifying their voices, we pave the way for a more prosperous, equitable, and peaceful nation. Today, and every day, let us stand with girls, and for girls, for in doing so, we stand for a better future for all.

By

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